

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-09

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 SAM-01 SAJ-01 SAB-01 FBO-02 SR-02

ORM-01 SCS-03 CIAE-00 NSAE-00 NSCE-00 SSO-00 USIE-00

INRE-00 EB-07 TRSE-00 FRB-03 COME-00 FAA-00 DOTE-00

SCCT-01 AID-05 CCO-00 PM-03 H-02 INR-07 L-02 NSC-05

SP-02 OC-05 OPR-02 PA-01 USSS-00 PRS-01 SCA-01 A-01

OMB-01 SS-15 SY-05 /102 W
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FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

TO SECSTATE WASHDC NIACT IMMEDIATE 3862

INFO DIA WASHDC IMMEDIATE

USCINCEUR IMMEDIATE

AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS IMMEDIATE

TEL AVIV IMMEDIATE 5741

AMEMBASSY AMMAN IMMEDIATE

AMEMBASSY ANKARA IMMEDIATE

AMEMBASSY ATHENS IMMEDIATE

AMEMBASSY TEHRAN IMMEDIATE

AMEMBASSY ROME IMMEDIATE

AMEMBASSY LONDON IMMEDIATE

AMEMBASSY PARIS IMMEDIATE

C O N F I D E N T I A L BEIRUT 4749

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINS LE PLO

SUBJECT: BEIRUT TENSE IN AFTERMATH APRIL 13 CLASHES BETWEEN PHALANGE
AND PALESTINIANS

SUMMARY: SITUATION TENSE AND UNCERTAIN IN BEIRUT FOLLOWING
CLASHES SUNDAY APR 13 BETWEEN MILITIA OF CHRISTIAN PHALANGE
PARTY AND PALESTINIANS IN AIN RAMANNEH SUBURB. SPORADIC
FIRING AND EXPLOSIONS OCCURRED THROUGHOUT NIGHT AND EARLY
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APR 14 AS GOL SOUGHT TO STABILIZE SITUATION WITH LITTLE APPAR-

ENT SUCCESS THUS FAR. ALL AMCINS SAFE TO OUR KNOWLEDGE.
NEXT MAJOR TEST OF FRAGILE PUBLIC ORDER WILL OCCUR AT 1000Z
TODAY, WHEN FUNERAL FOR UP TO 35 PALESTINIANS KILLED (FIGURES
VARY FROM 27 UPWARD) IS SCHEDULED TO TAKE PLACE. PRESENT
CRISIS, OCCURRING AGAINST BACKGROUND OF GOL WEAKNESS AND
DIVISION, HAS DISTURBING POETNTIAL. END SUMMARY.

1. ON BASIS OF FRAGMENTARY AND FREQUENTLY CONFLICTING NEWS
ACCOUNTS AND RUMORS, APR 13 INCIDENTS WHICH SPARKED CRISIS
WERE AS FOLLOWS: PHALANGIST LEADER, PIERRE GEMAYEL AND
FORMER PRES CAMILLE CHAMOUN ATTENDED MASS SUNDAY MORNING
AT CHURCH IN AIN RAMANNEH WITH BOTH PHALANGE MILITIA AND GOL
POLICE IN VICINITY. AT APPROXIMATELY 0800Z, VOLKSWAGEN
DRIVEN BY PALESTINIAN (ALLEGEDLY BELONGING TO PDFLP) DROVE
NEAR CHURCH AND WAS ASKED BY POLICEMAN NOT RPT NOT TO USE
STREET ON WHICH CHURCH LOCATED. AFTER ALTERCATION (IN WHICH
SOME ACCOUNTS CLAIM DRIVER WAS DISARMED AFTER THREATENING
POLICEMAN), VOLKSWAGEN DEPARTED.

2. SOME TIME LATER (0930Z BY SOME ACCOUNTS), ANOTHER VEHI-
CLE CARRYING FOUR ARMED PALESTINIANS ENTERED AREA AND
SPRAYED BY-STANDERS WITH MACHINE-GUN FIRE, FATALLY WOUNDING
THREE MEMBERS OF PHALANGE MILITIA, BEFORE SPEEDING AWAY.
AT APPROXIMATELY 1100Z, BUS LOADED WITH PALESTINIANS (AFFILIA-
TION AS YET UNDETERMINED) APPROACHED AREA RETURNING
FROM CEREMONIES IN SHATILA CAMP TO TEL ZAARTAR CAMP. IT
POSSIBLE THAT PRESENCE OF BUS WAS ACCIDENTAL, BUT PHALANGE
OPENED UP ON TARGET, REPORTEDLY KILLING 26 OF THOSE ABOARD.

3. AS NEWS OF INCIDENT SPREAD, FIRING AND EXPLOSIONS WERE
HEARD IN VARIOUS PARTS OF CITY (AIN RAMANNEH, SHIAH,
FURN AS SHUBAK, DEKWANI, GHOBEIRI) THROUGHOUT EVENING AND
INTO MORNING. BARRICADES WERE ALLEGEDLY ERECTED IN SINN AL
FIL. APPROX 15 ROCKETS WERE FIRED FROM BORJ AL BARAJNEH
REFUGEE CAMP INTO LARGELY CHRISTIAN SUBURB OF HARET HREIK,
APPARENTLY WITH LOCAL PHALANGE OFFICE AS PRIMARY TAR-
GET. STORE BELONGING TO PHALANGE NOTABLE, NAUM ABI-RASHED,
WAS BLOWN UP AND FACTORY NEAR SITE OF ORIGINAL INCIDENTS
CURRENTLY BURNING. DURING NIGHT, INCIDENTS (SOME UNCONFIRMED)
WERE REPORTED IN VARIOUS PARTS OF CITY, PARTICULARLY IN AREAS
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IN VICINITY OF PHALANGE OFFICES. ONE OF MOST SERIOUS INCIDENTS
HAPPENED IN AREA OF STARCO CENTER AND WE HAVE EYE-WITNESS
ACCOUNT OF FIRING IN VICINITY OF HOLIDAY INN, SEVERAL BLOCKS
FROM STARCO. THIS ALTERCATION APPARENTLY BEGAN WHEN TWO
PERSONS (SUBSEQUENTLY KILLED BY PHALANGE GUARDS) OPENED FIRE
ON PHALANGE OFFICE NEAR STARCO.

4. AS OF APR 14 0900Z, SITUATION IN BEIRUT IS TENSE

AND POPULATION APPEARS BE BRACING FOR FURTHER TROUBLE, PARTICULARLY AS TIME FOR PALESTINIAN FUNERAL (1000Z) APPROACHES. ANTICIPATED GIGANTIC GATHERING OF MOURNERS, STIRRED BY PRE-DICTABLE PALESTINIAN ASSERTION THAT PHALANGE BEARS ENTIRE BLAME FOR INCIDENTS, COULD EASILY SET ESCALATION OF FIGHTING IN ALREADY UNSTABLE ATMOSPHERE IN MOTION. WE HAVE WARNED EMBASSY PERSONNEL TO RESTRICT THEIR MOVEMENTS (ALTHOUGH NO RPT NO DECISION TO CLOSE EMBASSY HAS BEEN TAKEN AT THIS TIME) AND ARE PROVIDING SIMILAR ADVICE TO NON-OFFICIAL AMCITS WHO INQUIRE. WE HAVE LIKEWISE ADVISED AMERICAN COMMUNITY SCHOOL TO SUSPEND CLASSES AT 0900Z TODAY TO PERMIT CHILDREN TO REGAIN THEIR HOMES BEFORE LARGE CROWDS GATHER FOR FUNERAL PROCESSION. AT PRESENT TIME, SPORADIC SHOOTING IN VARIOUS PARTS OF TOWN CONTINUES. USIS REGIONAL SERVICE CENTER IN SINN AL FIL REPORTS FIRING GENERALIZED IN AREA AND HAS CLOSED DOWN. WE ALSO HAVE REPORTS FROM SEVERAL SOURCES THAT GENERAL FIRE-FIGHT TAKING PLACE IN VICINITY OF AIRPORT CIRCLE NEAR PHALANGE HEADQUARTERS ALTHOUGH ROUTE TO AIRPORT AND AIRPORT ITSELF OPENED ACCORDING LAST REPORT. CLASHES APPARENTLY ERUPTED THIS MORNING WHEN PALESTINIANS MARCHED TO NEARBY QUARANTINA HOSPITAL, WHERE PALESTINIAN DEAD WERE TAKEN AFTER YESTERDAY'S FIGHTING, TO CLAIM BODIES FOR FUNERAL. WE HAVE LITTLE INFO RE SITUATION IN OTHER PARTS OF COUNTRY, ALTHOUGH THERE ARE REPORTS OF DEMONSTRATION IN TRIPOLI AND COASTAL ROAD SOUTH HAS BEEN CUT AT SIDON.

5. COMMENT: PHALANGE RELATIONS WITH FEDAYEEN HAVE BEEN SUBJECT TO SERIES OF UPS AND DOWNS SINCE LARGE-SCALE CONFRONTATION OF 1969. DEPT WILL RECALL KAHALE INCIDENT OF EARLY 1970 WHEN PHALANGE AMBUSHED PALESTINIAN FUNERAL PROCESSION AND CRISIS WHICH ENSUED. PRESENT CONFRONTATION, HOWEVER, IS MOST SERIOUS OF ITS KIND IN LAST TWO YEARS, THE MORE SO AS KAMAL JUMBLATT AND OTHER "PROGRESSIVE" SPOKESMAN HAVE
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NOW CALLED FOR WITHDRAWAL OF TWO PHALANGE MINISTERS FROM ALREADY ENFEEBLED RASHID SOLH GOVT. SOLH CABINET HAS BEEN, OVER LAST WEEK OR MORE, DEFENDING ITS PERFORMANCE IN FACE OF STRONG ATTACKS IN PARLIAMENT AND WAS, UNTIL LATEST DEVELOPMENTS, EXPECTED TO WIN VOTE OF CONFIDENCE APR 15 BY 58 TO 65 VOTES. WE SUSPECT THAT DEBATE AND VOTE WILL NOT OCCUR IN LIGHT OF SERIOUS SITUATION IN COUNTRY. NEVERTHELESS, IT HAS BEEN COMBINATION OF JUMBLATT AND GEMAYEL WHICH HAS PROVIDED SUPPORT FOR SOLH GOVT AND ON WHICH PROJECTIONS OF CABINET'S SURVIVABILITY WERE BASED. CONSEQUENTLY, APPARENT OPENBREAK BETWEEN JUMBLATT AND GEMAYEL PILLARS WILL GREATLY UNDERCUT GOVT'S ABILITY TO DEAL FIRMLY AND CONFIDENTLY WITH PRESENT CRISIS.

6. WE BELIEVE CURRENT CRISIS ALSO ACQUIRES GREATER DEGREE

OF SERIOUSNESS AS RESULT OF SEVERAL OTHER FACTORS CONVERGING AT THIS TIME: A) RECENT INFLAMATION OF CONFESSIONAL DIVISIONS AS RESULT OF INCIDENTS IN SODON LAST MONTH; B) LIKELY NEUTRALIZATION OF ARMY AND SECURITY FORCES AS RESULT THEIR EXPERIENCE IN SIDON AND POSSIBILITY THAT THEY WILL NOT BE DIRECTED TO ACT DECISIVELY IN CURRENT CRISIS (E.G., WE HAVE UNCONFIRMED REPORT THAT SQUAD 16 FORCES IN AREA OF AIRPORT CIRCLE FIGHTING HAVE ORDERS TO STAND ASIDE); C) PRES FRANGIE'S CONVALESCENCE IN AMERICAN UNIVERSITY HOSPITAL FROM GALL BLADDER OPERATION PERFORMED APR 12; AND D) LIKELIHOOD THAT, AS LAST NIGHT'S EVENTS DEMONSTRATE, CLASHES OF THIS KIND COULD EASILY DEGENERATE INTO GENERALIZED HIT-AND-RUN STRIKES WHICH WOULD ALMOST INEVITABLY INVOLVE FOREIGN RESIDENTS OF CITY.

7. DENOUEMENT OF CRISIS WILL UNQUESTIONABLY DEPEND UPON RESOLVE AND GOOD SENSE OF GOL AND PLO LEADERSHIPS AND THEIR ABILITY TO CONTROL ARMED ELEMENTS WHICH HAVE NOW ESCAPED PANDORA'S BOX. IT WILL ALSO AS IN PAST PROBABLY DEPEND ON EFFORTS OF LEADING POLITICAL LEADERS AND PALESTINIANS. GOL, ACCORDING FEW CONVERSATIONS WE'VE HAD ARE EXTREMELY CONCERNED ABOUT SITUATION AND ITS POTENTIAL FOR SPARKING CIVIL STRIFE INVOLVING PALESTINIANS. SO FAR THEIR EFFORTS APPEAR FOCUSED ON CONTAINING THE SITUATION. ACCORDING RADIO GOL HAS JUST ARRESTED 14 PERSONS (IDENTITY UNKNOWN). MEANWHILE, 'ARAFAT AND OTHER PLO LEADERS
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HAVE REPORTEDLY BEEN INVEIGHING OTHER ARAB STATES, DIRECTLY AND THROUGH LOCAL ARAB AMBASSADORS, TO BRING PRESSURE ON GOL TO PUNISH PHALANGIST "CULPRITS". IN SHORT, TO THIS MOMENT, ELEMENTS OF "LEBANESE SOLUTION" TO CRISIS ARE NOT RPT NOT APPARENT.

8. ALL AMCITS SAFE TO OUR KNOWLEDGE.
GODLEY

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